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The Collapse of Superman

WILLIAM ROSCOE THAYER

UC-NRLF

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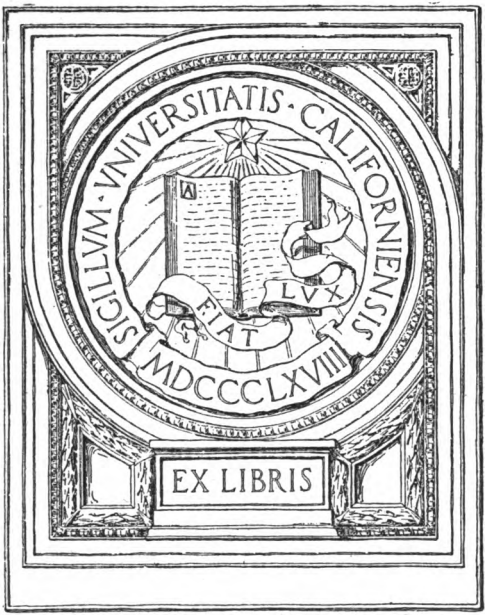

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THE COLLAPSE OF SUPERMAN

BY

WILLIAM ROSCOE THAYER

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
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THE COLLAPSE OF SUPERMAN

I

A FEW years ago a strange myth went up and down the world. We were told that the Germans were Supermen; and as they themselves said so which of us could doubt it? For the Germans had once a high reputation for scientific precision, and it could not be supposed that either this or their native modesty would permit them to magnify, by even a hair's breadth, their virtues or their attainments.

If you repeat a declaration often enough, the world either dismisses you as a bore or kills you as a fanatic or ends by believing you. In

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one way or another it gets rid of you. So the German claim was believed without a thorough sifting of the evidence.

If in a company of ordinary men all but one should shrink to Lilliputian size, that one simply by keeping his natural proportions would be a giant among them. This is what the German Gullivers assured us had happened; and appearances seemed to confirm them.

In the course of a generation the Germans had surpassed the other nations in applying science to industry. In some commodities their brands were the best; in nearly all their average was better than that of their competitors. Though they made few of the cardinal discoveries in science or in invention, they

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quickly caught up, and adapted or improved, the discoveries of others.

They organized a system of education as complete as that of the Jesuits and quite as far-reaching; for it took the German child from the time he left the kindergarten and guided him until he left the university. It developed his mental faculties to work most efficiently according to the commands of his official masters; it taught him reverence for discipline; it revealed to him the importance of patient labor on subjects which seemed infinitesimal or irrelevant. During the first three quarters of the nineteenth century this German education had also scientific accuracy, or truth, as its aim; and it was so fruitful that scholars from Europe

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and America went to Germany to profit by it, while German professors strode over the earth investigating, taking notes, and adorning the landscape with their robust — if not always Apollonian — figures.

Greater than any discovery in science, however, was the German discovery that if you have many millions of persons all trained by the same method, you can treat them as you could so many million empty rifles — you can load each with your favorite cartridge and aim it at whatever target you choose. And this is what actually happened. When German education had reduced, or raised, the Germans to the level of perfect machines, their master, swollen with military ambition and with

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dynastic ends, came along and loaded them for his own purposes. In old times every American colonist kept his gun within easy reach, lest he should need it to shoot at an unexpected Indian or bear. Wonderful is it to think that ten million or more Germans, living flesh-and-blood Germans, stood ready, like so many mechanical weapons, devoid of will, judgment, or choice, — empty barrels, — to be loaded and fired in whatever direction their master aimed them.

When the Germans saw that other peoples lacked their own astonishing organization, they began to feel contempt for them; and this contempt reacted so as to puff up their own self-esteem. They drew the unsafe deduction that all meth-

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ods except theirs must be bad. Which of us has not had the privilege of listening to the German *Gelehrter*, the sum of whose talk, lecture, or harangue has been: "What I don't know is n't knowledge"? And, in truth, is Gulliver to be blamed for perceiving that he is a giant in comparison with the Lilliputians round him? Gulliver had no reason for suspecting that his eyes were out of order; why should the Germans suppose that they were suffering from unbridled vanity — that disease for which no oculist has a remedy? If they applied scientific tests, they got results that confirmed them, for to them science had become a mirror that reflected their own figures. Cold statistics proved that they

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were beating their competitors in industrial progress; that they had the largest number of available soldiers in proportion to population; that they excelled in the details of municipal government; that they counted fewer illiterates than their neighbors; and so on — each proof serving to stimulate their megalomania.

We ordinary mortals, who have never had the slightest reason for supposing that we are taller than our fellows, must not be too harsh toward the Teutons who suffered from this illusion. Each of us doubtless cherishes his particular vanity — small, of course, in keeping with his non-German size. If we are immune from megalomania the credit is due to our insignifi-

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cance, for that malady attacks only the great; and therefore the Germans, more than any other people to-day, are likely to catch it. In their case it had become epidemic by the year 1914. So far as it appears, no single German remained to say then: "Brethren, perhaps we are really not so colossal as we think. Let us take a foreign yardstick and measure ourselves again." Instead of this the gospel of the Superman was shouted into every Teutonic ear. The Prussians remembered that they had won three wars, and they knew that in all the world they had the most powerful military organization, prepared for use at a moment's notice. The supremacy of German music, of German education — but why specify?

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— of German everything, needed no demonstration. Even Peasant Michel exulted in the conviction that he was a Superpeasant and that he enjoyed the luxury, unknown to his class in other countries, of eating Superturnip and Supersausage.

Obviously the Superman could not be satisfied with the philosophy, ethics, or religion by which ordinary men lived. The giant must have the giant's robe, not the swaddling clothes of an infant. So the prophets of Supermania devised a philosophical and ethical system which embodied its ideals, and they created a deity they called Gott — a strangely composite creature who, when analyzed, turns out to be four parts war god

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of the Goth-and-Vandal type and one part Frederick the Great. The care of Gott they confided to their supreme Superman, the Kaiser, who had been assuring them for twenty-five years that he knew better than any one else what Gott wished. Even mortals admitted that it was proper that the mere Almighty should be in charge of the Almightiest. Religion has not been the forte of the Pan-Germanists. Listen to the words of an avowed atheist, Professor Wilhelm Ostwald, the first of the German Exchange Professors at Harvard, whose incorrigible Prussian condescension, flecked with occasional efforts at ursine affability, is still cheerfully remembered there. He said in 1914: "In our country *God*

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the Father is reserved for the personal use of the Emperor. In one instance He was mentioned in a report of the General Staff, but it is to be noted that He has not appeared there a second time." [1]

The epidemic of Supermania among the Germans might have been no more than a grotesque diversion in the humdrum of life — as when children at their play make believe that they are ogres and giants, kings and emperors — had it not been that the Supermen were taught that they must prove their superiority by subduing or by destroying their neighbors; that war was the normal exercise of Supermen, the only exercise, in fact, by

[1] Interview in Paris *Temps*, November 26, 1914.

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which they could prosper. If you tell a man you are a Hercules and he shakes his head doubtingly, you need simply to kill him in order to kill his doubt. As long as you let him live, you will be haunted by the thought that there is at least one person who does not take you at your own valuation. In civilized countries, however, the individual who resorts to this simple means runs the risk of being tried and hanged for homicide.

> "It hath the primal eldest curse upon 't,
> A brother's murder."

Nevertheless, when a nation of Supermen adopt the precedent of Cain, they expect either to exterminate their victims or so to crush them that there will be no reprisals. Cain, it should be said, seems to

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have been a hot-headed youth who killed his brother in a fit of anger; the German Superman, on the contrary, does nothing without premeditation. His Kaiser having revealed to him the inmost purposes of Gott, and German science having confirmed the Kaiser's revelations, the Superman puts them into action. It is as easy as pulling the strings of a jumping-jack.

Again let us not be too hard on the Germans for becoming infatuated with the gospel of Supermania! Suppose that we Americans were told by our rulers, statesmen, prophets, philosophers, captains of industry, drummers, editors, parsons, professors, statisticians, for thirty years together, that we are the Chosen People, could we resist

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the flattering imputation? Do we always close our ears when political spellbinders let loose the American Eagle amid a whirlwind of patriotic eloquence? Probably not; and yet all the spellbinders in the United States could never persuade all the Americans to think alike at any given moment. Therein Americans and other civilized peoples differ from the Germans. But let us not be conceited over this; whatever credit there is belongs to Nature, who made Yankees each with an individual thinking piece which secretes daily its necessary supply of thoughts.

Nature delights in variety, however, and so she made Germans each with a thought cavity in his skull — a cavity that remains

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empty unless the agent of the Kaiser, or State, comes round every morning with canned thoughts, which he pours into it just as a housewife fills her lamps with oil or a chauffeur his tank with gasoline.

So much for what we may call the potential Superman; so much for the estimate that the Germans put upon themselves and caused even foreigners to accept. Let us now see how far these Supermen in action have come up to expectations.

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II

At the end of July, 1914, William and his advisers — if, indeed, he allows any one to advise him — believed that the enemies against whom they had long been plotting were so unprepared that it would be easy to crush them by sudden attack. For several weeks Germany had been making such preparations for mobilizing her armies as she could without exciting suspicion. Naturally, at the beginning of August, when the German troops invaded France and Belgium, they took the French and Belgian armies almost by surprise. Alone among the forces of the Western Allies the

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British fleet was mobilized. The German Supermen swept through Belgium and northeastern France, outnumbering the hastily assembled troops of their adversaries three or four to one; but even this disparity in their favor would not have given them their swift success if it had not been for their gigantic howitzers, which demolished fortifications supposed to be impregnable.

So far it appears that neither in those early combats nor later did the German soldiers win in open fight against an equal number of foes. The same was true in the war of 1870.[1] This is a strange record

[1] In 1866, in the war between Prussia and Austria, the Prussians had 221,000 troops at the decisive battle of *Sadowa*, the Austrians

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for Supermen! A German Superman, we might innocently think, ought to be a match for at least three or four French or British fighters. It turned out, however, that it was the German readiness, the superior equipment, and, above all, the surprise, which gave the Kaiser his immense and immediate advantage. And yet with all these elements and Prussian prestige —

had only 200,000. In the Franco-Prussian War of 1870, the inequalities were still greater. At *Woerth*, the Germans numbered 84,000, the French 39,000. At *Gravelotte*, the Germans had 205,000, the French 39,000. At *Reichshoffen*, the Germans 180,000, the French 45,000. At *St. Privat*, the Germans 80,000, the French 18,000. At *Sedan*, the Germans 220,000, the French 100,000. These figures pay a high tribute to the German strategy which always contrived to bring a larger force than the enemy's into battle; they do not, however, exalt the German soldier in a man-to-man contest with foreign foes.

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which had become a legend — in his favor, he was not able to achieve his purpose. His triumphal entry into Paris — to celebrate which, with true German thoroughness, he struck a medal before the war began — never took place. At the end of the first week in September the French, under Manoury, made a sudden dash on the German right, which upset Von Kluck's plans and so thoroughly dislocated the entire strategy of the German General Staff that on September 9 Foch's army drove like a thunderbolt through the German centre, saved Paris, sent all the Kaiser's forces in full retreat eastward and northward, pricked the Supermen's dream of World Dominion and saved civilization.

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Here again we are perplexed. Which were the Supermen — the German centre of Prussian Guards and Saxons, who crumbled before Foch's Frenchmen, or those Frenchmen themselves? Would it be correct to define a German Superman as one who cannot stand up against a mere ordinary foreign man? The Ninety-three Professors who certified to the moral, not less than to the military, perfection of Germany would dissent from this; and yet how does it profit you to be a Superman if you run before any smaller variety of men?

Looking back, we see that the German occupation of Belgium and northeastern France was due to preparation and surprise, and not to any superhuman quality; and

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this is true of all the Teutonic successes during the first two years of the war. The Germans invariably had either larger forces or far superior equipment, or both. They accomplished their great drive into Russia at a time when the Russian supply of munitions was exhausted. For the Germans to sweep almost defenseless masses of Russians before them was, therefore, a scarcely more glorious feat than it was for the Spaniards to put to rout the Aztecs with their bows and arrows, or for the heroic ranchmen who dropped from the fatigue of slaughtering rabbits in a drive. Search where we will, we find nothing Supermannish in such victories.

Ah, but does not the perfect

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preparation indicate the Superman? Let us examine. If you had spent your life from boyhood up using dumb-bells, should you expect to qualify as a Superman if in a competition with your neighbors, who had devoted themselves to golf and tennis and yachting, you should lift with ease the heaviest dumb-bell, which the strongest of them could not stir? Hardly. Well for fifty years the Prussians had made militarism the chief business of life; wherever possible they applied each new invention to improving their arms and equipment; they indulged in three wars, which gave them invaluable practice. They foresaw that logistics would be not less important than strategy or tactics in the conflict they were

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secretly preparing for. Nor should we minimize the stimulating effect which the knowledge that he would be called upon to serve in an enterprise for the glory of the Fatherland, and with certain success in sight, produced on each recruit.

None of this militarist training went on in Great Britain, where the army in peace time, composed of volunteers, numbered less than two hundredths per cent of the population, and since the Crimea had never faced a European enemy. France, on the contrary, had been compelled by the German menace to maintain a large armament; but, her purpose being defense and not aggression, she conscripted relatively fewer men than did the Germans; and her population num-

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bered less than forty millions, while Germany's was nearly seventy millions. Her military system was also less efficiently carried out. Russia, likewise, and Italy had conscription and imitated German methods, but without German thoroughness.

It is not unfair to say, accordingly, that when Germany sprang the test of ordeal by battle on her European neighbors they were scarcely less ready than were the competitors of our expert in dumbbells to cope with him. To argue from their enemies' unpreparedness that the Germans were Supermen would violate any logic based on reason. And here a grotesque conundrum suggests itself: If it took the Germans, by devoting

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their chief attention to militarism, forty years to organize a magnificent army, and if it has taken the English, a non-militarist nation, two years to organize an army equal and in some respects superior to the German, who are the Supermen?

Perhaps I am not deferent enough to the Superman; but I deny that anything — whether a Kaiser made of flesh and blood or a Krupp gun made of steel — should be an object of servile reverence, much less of worship. If I were hunting for a Superman I should look for him in some one who achieved great victories against great odds. This has not been true of the Germans in the present war. Hindenburg in East Prussia and

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Poland, Mackensen in Galicia and the Balkans, Falkenhayn in Rumania, and the generals who led the dash into France and Belgium — all had great odds in their favor. As soon as the Allies rose anywhere near to an equality with them, the German spectacular successes ceased.

Even the fact that at the beginning of the war the total available man power of the Germans was only one half that of the Allies does not entitle them to pose as Supermen, for their geographical position and the abundance of their means of transportation more than doubles — probably it trebles — their military potentiality. No other country in Europe has so fine a natural defense as Germany with

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Austria bound to her. The fringe of neutral states, Holland and Denmark, protects her from attack by sea; the ridges of Alsace and Lorraine, accessible only through two or three gaps, which have been splendidly fortified, fend her from French invasion on the west; neutral Switzerland serves as a bulwark on the southwest; Austria lies between her and Italian or Slavic aggression on the southeast; and her eastern frontier, dotted with lakes and marshes, can be reached by Russian invaders only after they have crossed long stretches of country. Five German strategic railways can rush German troops by the hundred thousand to protect that frontier at any point from the Russians, against one railway

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available for carrying the Russian armies westward.

The girdle of neutral states which have clandestinely furnished Germany with food and military staples, thereby prolonging the war by at least a year, should also be counted as an immense help to her. If those states had been integral parts of Germany that help could not have been rendered. Holland and Denmark would have been blockaded from the start.

To the incalculable advantage due to geography must be added that which the Germans enjoyed by seizing Belgium and northeastern France — a seizure that involved the breaking by the Germans of solemn treaties, and pilloried them as outlaws from civilization.

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We can hardly contend that the surprise and deceit and the outrage on morals and humanity which were the elements of their western invasion can qualify them as Supermen, unless we agree that the ruffian who bludgeons his victim from behind at night is a Superman.

Instead of calling Supermen the German troops who were shuttled from east to west and from west to east in admirably appointed railway trains, which took along with them artillery, food, and munitions, I should apply that term to Napoleon's Army of Italy, which marched on foot from Paris to Venice, ill-fed, ill-clothed, ill-equipped — a mob rather than an army — led by the "little puppet with disheveled hair," and which

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wiped out three Austrian armies of much larger numbers, commanded by Austria's most renowned generals. Similarly, was not Napoleon's assembling of the host with which he invaded Russia in 1812 a more astonishing task than that of mobilizing the Germans in 1914, or of dispatching them in trains and motors and trucks and lorries to any desired point? Napoleon's conscripts *footed* it from the Pyrenees, or from Finisterre, or from Calabria — to Vilna. As you are whirled at forty miles an hour across the American continent amid such modest luxury as a Pullman car affords, if you happen to think of the pioneers, thirsty, weary, footsore, shrouded in doubts, who first blazed the trail

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over the prairies and the Rockies to the Pacific, do you look down on them as mere men? Do you look up to yourself as a Superman?

With the best intentions in the world, I fear that we must dismiss the Superman myth; or at least we must so revise our definition of Superman that it will fit not those who can do things on a large scale because they have every contrivance at their disposal, but those who work marvels with a meagre outfit. Call Columbus in his tiny *Santa Maria*, of one hundred tons burthen, a Superman if you will, but not the captain of a fifty-thousand-ton ocean liner.

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III

In our glimpses at individual Supermen and at concrete examples of their acts, perhaps we have not paid sufficient respect to the philosophic theory of the Superman. The Germans assure us that in order to understand them we must think Germanly. They see themselves as Supermen — giants among dwarfs; but through some regrettable defect in our vision we see them as a race of great vigor and remarkable attainments in certain fields, but not at all as demigods or even as Titans. The notion that here and there a Superman is born, a person "beyond good and

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evil," who is expected not only not to curb his appetites and passions, but to prove his Supermannishness by giving them a free rein, is a very inebriating notion if you are clever enough to persuade yourself and your group that you are one of these privileged creatures.

The champions of the philosophy of Supermania lean heavily on biology to support their creed. They have been misled by the phrase "the survival of the fittest." You might infer, to hear them buzz, that only the fittest survive, or, to put it conversely, the fact that you survive is proof that you are the "fittest." Possibly a German complacently accepts this as a self-evident truth, but most of us non-Germans, even in our moods of

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most inflated self-esteem, must have our doubts as to our being the "fittest." Historians will recall many individuals, dead long since in body but living on in spirit, who were "fitter" than any among us to survive; nay, were there not many groups and even periods in the past which our "fittest" to-day cannot match?

To interpret history in this mechanical fashion is as unsafe as it would be to try to climb the Matterhorn by practicing the goose-step. If the "survival of the fittest" meant what the German believers in the phrase claim, then long before our geological era one species of mammals would have devoured all the others, and there would be only one triumphantly

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"fittest" kind of bird, of insect, and of fish; and long ago one breed of men would have swallowed up or exterminated all other breeds. Has this happened? Has a tribe of Supermen arisen to dominate the world?

There have been conquering races—Assyrians, Egyptians, Macedonians, Romans, Teutonic Barbarians, — ancient and modern, — Normans, Arabs, Turks, Spaniards, Anglo-Saxons, Frenchmen, Prussians, — but it would be difficult to discover the quality common to them all which made each in turn "fittest." And if we discovered it we should learn only what made them military conquerors.

But ability for military conquest

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is only one form of "fitness," and not the highest. Marcus Aurelius, for instance, would have gone down before one of the brawny gladiators in the Colosseum; or, to make the point even clearer, say that he had succumbed to a lion in the arena. How would his fitness to survive compare with that of the gladiator or the wild beast? Over the earth the common fly — *Musca domestica* — is more plentifully diffused than even the Germans; fear of *lèse-majesté* restrains us from making any inference as to their relative fitness.

So there are, it seems, different kinds of fitness to survive; there are heights of excellence not dreamt of by the German General Staff; and there is human progress not to be

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measured or attained by the Prussian goose-step. "Fitness to survive?" After nearly eighteen hundred years the golden thoughts of Marcus Aurelius survive to-day in the hearts of thousands, but the names of the victorious gladiators in the Flavian Amphitheatre are forgotten as those of Hindenburg, Moltke, and Mackensen will be when other standards of fitness than those of slaughter rule again. In days of Frightfulness like the present it gives solace to reflect that we can still hear Theocritus singing his idyls among the moonlit groves, while all the wicked tyrants of Syracuse associated with atrocious crimes are mere names or even less. And if to-day we had to choose between preserving the art,

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literature, and history of Athens and the *Kultur* of Germany under William II, can there be any doubt as to which we should jettison? In blotting out the Sieges Allee we should deprive posterity of many a smile, and in throwing over the records of Pan-Germanism and Supermania we should deprive it of records of otherwise incredible racial hallucination; but, after all, Treitschke, Nietzsche, and the Hohenzollern Kaiser are but for a generation, whereas Thucydides, Plato, and Pericles are for all time.

May we not conclude, therefore, that when we subject the Superman to the test of philosophy, or of biology, or of history, they refuse to recognize his claims?

"We have seen you before," they

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say; "we have watched your recurrent appearance in human affairs ever since the time when man, ceasing to be a quadruped, stood up on his hind feet. We strongly suspect, if you will permit us to say so, that you are really a survival of the quadruped, or *Infra*man, in the human race. We admire your adroitness in palming off *Infra* as *Super;* but really who are the people whom you have fooled in this way? Do they stand on their heads, or is their eyesight twisted, or do they dwell in asylums for the insane, or are they still quadrupeds?"

They are none of these; they are Germans.

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IV

At the outset of our philosophic inquiry a chilling question confronts us: How can we know that the Germans are Supermen? If the attributes of the Superman are above those of mere man, what faculty has mere man by which to recognize them? For the Superman is not simply a being in whom the talents of mere man are magnified many times — he is a higher creation. We can know Cæsar, Socrates, Napoleon, Emerson, because they, too, were men; but how can we know the Superman any more than the kitten which chases its tail on the floor beside me knows my nature or thoughts?

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Perhaps our only way is to assume that the Superman belongs to our genus and to study him experimentally as we would any other strange creature. So we shall be able to value him in human terms, which may or may not coincide with the value he has set upon himself. I remarked just now that he does not appear to have excelled even in science in those large discoveries, the product of the creative imagination, which we associate with superior minds. The steamboat was invented by Fulton, an American; the locomotive, applied to the railroad, by Stephenson, an Englishman; the telegraph by Morse, an American; wireless telegraphy by Marconi, an Italian with an Irish mother; the tele-

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phone by Bell, an American; and when we come to the field of war implements what surprise is this? Not German Supermen, but mere men of other races dreamed, devised, and designed them. An American named Holland put the first submarine into the water; he, too, invented the submarine torpedo; Maxim, another American, invented the machine gun; two American brothers, the Wrights, set flying the first practical airplanes; Bessemer, an Englishman, discovered the process for making steel, without which Krupp guns, large or small, would not have existed; and nearly a century and a half ago a Frenchman, Montgolfier, invented the balloon, the principle of which underlies the Zeppelin,

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the dirigible, and all similar modern varieties. Even in the art of war itself, it was not the Germans who discovered trench warfare.

Not a German in all this list. The Supermen turn out to be amazingly lavish borrowers of other men's ideas, prolific adapters, untiring imitators. Among men it is the discoverer — and not those who follow him or perhaps improve upon him — that is rated highest. Can the ranking be reversed among Supermen? Among them do the second-rates stand higher than the first?

If we leave the sphere of invention and enter that of basic principles, we find that no German, but a modest Englishman, Charles Darwin, announced the idea which

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has been the keynote of modern thought and of modern science. Louis Pasteur, a modest Frenchman demonstrated the true method of biology; Michael Faraday, a modest Englishman, laid down the laws which have guided all subsequent students and appliers of electricity; Joseph Lister, another modest Englishman, conferred upon this suffering world the boon of antisepsis.

Our search for indisputable proof that Germans have been Supermen in these many fields seems barren. Can they have been mistaken? Does not the giant know the length of his own belt? Who are we to doubt or to deny? Is it not presumptuous in moles to question the magnitude of elephants? In fair-

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ness we must judge the Germans by their achievements in the activity which they pronounce supreme. That activity is war, the sum and crown of all their ideals and talents. I have hinted, perhaps too audaciously, that in the actual war the Germans have revealed none of those transcendent qualities that must be, of course, the martial heritage of Supermen. Let us glance once more at this matter, which is evidently the final test for our poor human intelligence of the Superman's claims.

We must never forget that when the Kaiser forced his Atrocious War upon the world in August, 1914, he commanded the most stupendous army the world had ever seen; in equipment, in drill, in the

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speed of its mobilization, it had no rivals. It swept on, apparently irresistible, for thirty-six days; then Manoury found the crevice in the German giant's armor, plunged his sword into it, and the monster reeled backward. Four days later it was in full retreat. This is puzzling to the plain common-sense man. It surprised even the Germans themselves. In the happy days of Bourbon despotism in the Two Sicilies, the soldiers were given amulets, which, they were assured, would render them invulnerable to the bullets of their enemies. What must a Bourbon soldier have thought when he was brought to the ground by a ball that smashed his thigh? The Kaiser gave his German soldiers simi-

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lar amulets — he told them that they were Supermen and invincible. When they were beaten at the Marne and only by their superior running ability succeeded in reaching the Aisne in time to dig themselves in before their pursuers came up with them, were they troubled by doubts as to the validity of their amulets? Being Germans, they probably indulged in no surmises, for the German soldier is trained not to think.

But a few weeks later the Kaiser, having been baffled at the Marne, decided to make a drive on Calais. What could hinder him? There were a hundred thousand British troops round Ypres, but the Kaiser had already in a speech sneered away General French's "contempt-

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ible little army." The Kaiser had been the master strategist and victor in the German grand manœuvres for twenty-five years, and his verdict on military qualities must therefore be final. So he sent half a million of his best troops on their promenade to Calais; but at Ypres the "Contemptibles" — who wear that as a name of honor forever — stood their ground; they had only rifles and small field pieces to oppose the heavy artillery and the machine guns of the enemy; they were mostly unused to European warfare fighting against the best regiments of Germany; they were only Britishers while their foes were Germans. And yet the "Contemptibles" held fast; many of them died with a cheer, but they

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held fast. The flower of the Kaiser's army never got beyond Ypres, either then or in the three years that have followed.

Here is another puzzle for the plain common-sense mere man. If one Britisher can check and virtually defeat five Germans, which is the real Superman? Let us pray to be "Contemptibles," and let us not begrudge the beaten Supermen their Iron Crosses.

One form — is it not the most loathsome? — of German mendacity and deceit, is the bribery by the Germans of the armies of their enemies. Thus the Superman did not overcome the Russians by superior military skill and bravery, but by corrupting those Russians — from the dweller in the Imperial Palace

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to generals, colonels, and mere captains — who had charge of supplying the Russian armies with food, munitions, and clothing, or who led the troops. Russia was sold out by traitors: the buyers were the Germans. So, too, the regiments which started the Italian avalanche of panic at Plezzo had previously been stroked by German agents. Here again is a strange paradox. The Supermen, who preach that War is the highest business of life, the pleasure which they chiefly yearn to enjoy, instead of indulging themselves to the full when they can, buy off, paralyse with bribes, the foes who should fight them. What can this be? *Kultur?* Stonewall Jackson did not win Chancellorsville or Grant take Vicksburg

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by bribery. But then, they were not Supermen, they were not Germans; they were honest, honorable, and chivalrous soldiers, and so were their adversaries.

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V

EXCEPT for the way in which the Germans carried out Frightfulness after the war began, nothing so startled the world as their inability to comprehend the point of view of other nations. They were themselves astonished that anybody should criticize their campaign of rape, arson, and murder in Belgium and France or their disregard of solemn compacts. "Is not war war?" they asked. "Is a treaty more than a scrap of paper?" To them it was inconceivable that Belgium should hold her honor dearer than her safety — that England should stand by her pledges —

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that France should be moved by an instinct deeper than that of self-preservation. The Germans had been so long in the habit of assuming that the earth revolved on a German pivot that they took it for granted that all the other Powers would accept without demur the plea of "German necessity."

In ordinary life this trait is common enough; but instead of reverently kneeling to those who are afflicted by it we pity them, recommend sedatives or a bag of ice at the base of the brain, and meditation on the wisdom of humility. If now we are to believe that the swelled head is the sign of the German Superman, shall we not ask what it profits him? If the state of being a Superman deprives him

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of the power to understand the thoughts and motives of mere men, is he not to be pitied? For he lies at the mercy of insignificant creatures, who may in a week upset the plans he has been maturing for forty years. Who would wish to be a Superman on those terms? An insignificant mere man can fathom the German's psychology while the German is as nonplused as a South Sea Islander before an English Bible.

I have heard it argued that though we must deny to the Germans their claim, on military grounds, of being supreme, — for measuring their performance in relation to their resources they have fallen far short of even a mere man like Napoleon, not to mention

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such ancients as Alexander and Hannibal, — yet in mendacity and deceit they have beaten the world's record. Their spies burrow in all lands; their cunning corrodes every class of society; they have so far forgotten what truth is that they cannot fabricate a lie that looks enough like truth to be effective.

Frankly, the evidence is in their favor, for they have brought mendacity to a degree of perfection that Metternich or Gortchakoff or Frederick the Great himself would have envied. We must go back to the Renaissance — to the consummate Papal masters of craft, to Sixtus IV or to Alexander VI, let us say — to find their equals.

And yet, having admitted this, having accepted the claim that

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they have spread their spider's web from pole to pole, we ought to point out in the name of truth — and truth must be heard even when lies are in question — that the most extraordinary aptitude for cunning and mendacity would not entitle its possessor to pass for a Superman. Lies of all kinds are emitted like counterfeit money by the lower grade of mere men, and by degenerates, savages, and children. To base the German claim to Supermania on a lie, therefore, may seem to the heartless singularly appropriate; but it cannot be established. No one argues that the Renaissance delinquents were Supermen. Or, if we look simply at the practical side, the fact that an American detective served Count Bernstorff,

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German Ambassador, as valet for twenty months must always dispose of the German Superman's claims to supremacy even in cunning.

The Superman, as a member of a Superpeople which, according to its prophets, must choose between world power and downfall, deserves our heartiest sympathy. If you, reader, were to be suddenly obsessed by the idea that you must go out and whip everybody you met in the street or be whipped and cast onto the dump, would not you be an object of pity? Supermania seems so obsolete that it requires almost as great an effort of the imagination to believe that it has come to life again as that we are in danger of the resurrection of the Harpies.

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In an insane asylum a patient had the delusion that he was Julius Cæsar, and his keepers humored him — and all went well. After a while another patient came who imagined himself Charlemagne. He began to rattle the imaginary scabbard of an imaginary sword and to strut imperially; and the keepers humored him too — and all went well. That is the common-sense way in which, outside of Germany, they treat victims of Supermania. Beyond the Rhine, however, they prefer a different régime. They say, "Hail, Cæsar!" or "Hoch! Hoch! Charlemagne!" and they give him a real sword in a real scabbard, and obsequiously kiss the hem of his garment; and so they confirm his delusion in him.

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But presently the delusion reacts on themselves.

Granted that ambition is rooted very deep in the human heart, its gratification in the form of dominating a conquered people has long since lost savor for civilized men and women. To gloat over the fact that, thanks to your superior force, you can compel others to do your bidding against their will allies you with the earlier types of barbarians who took delight in making slaves of their men captives and concubines of the women. That is the attitude bred by despotism. Some of us have been so genuinely imbued with Democracy that we feel not merely aversion but shame at the thought of compulsion derived from brute force, and we felt not ela-

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tion but repugnance when, through a cruel stroke of fortune, several million Filipinos became our "subjects." Weaklings that we are, we are unworthy to catch that form of *Supermania Teutonica furibunda.*

With all its defects, history must at least be credited with one compensating virtue — it shows us that there is nothing new under the sun. Amid great calamities or horrors or despair wise Clio whispers: "This has happened before; worse than this have I seen; this too shall pass away."

History is not a prophet, but only recently she said: "The struggle between right and might is eternal. A century and more ago the gospel of the rights of man, of democracy, was embodied in

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French armies which marched under the command of Napoleon from end to end in Europe, shaking down thrones and institutions. The personal ambition of Napoleon strove to use this earth-shaking force for his selfish ends. Then Europe rose and destroyed him, but Democracy went marching on."

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VI

Lovers of fact cannot fail to be grateful to the Germans, the self-announced Supermen, for their complete demonstration that there are no Supermen. Even over here in America it was a little annoying to harbor the suspicion that possibly the German professor, or the editor of the German newspaper, or the fellow who blew up factories and wrecked trains and hid bombs in passenger steamers, being German, might be a Superman. To Yankee eyes the professor was simply a sneak, oily and eely; the editor one of the brood whom Bismarck called "reptile"; the bomber

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a low villain in whom great cowardice did not preclude great crime. Our Yankee eyes have been justified by the pricking of the Superman bubble. The Kaiser's workers here are no more and no less than our Yankee eyes have seen them to be — curious types of *Infra*men whose portraits, under other names, adorn the Rogues' Galleries, and whose peculiar activities are the study of the criminal pathologists of many nations. Even were the Germans to win the War, the fact would remain that they are not Supermen. The qualities they have tried to win by link them with Caliban — not with the angels.

The collapse of the Superman myth will bring relief not only to those who accepted it on too slight

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warrant and feared that the German Supermen would overrun the world and persecute and cretinize its inhabitants, but it will also relieve those who saw that the Superman creed, if true, meant the negation of whatever moral and spiritual ideals mankind have laid hold of in the course of their painful ascent from savagery.

To some of us it seemed rather late in the day for any of our contemporaries to puff out their chests and say: "Behold, we are the Chosen People!" And when they flaunted before our skeptical gaze their affidavit to that effect, signed by Professor Haeckel, and Professor Harnack, and the Professor of Entomology This and the Professor of Etymology That, and all the

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other ninety-three incarnations of German veracity — and bootlicking — instead of being convinced, our irreverent minds began to wonder whether Haeckel, Harnack, and the rest had been cultivating their special fields of science with the same disregard of fact that they displayed in the easily verifiable theory of the Superman.

The doctrine of the Chosen People came at an early stage of development. Readers of the Old Testament find it tenaciously held by some of the ancient Hebrew tribes in Syria. For it to reappear three thousand years later among the Germans, whose Hohenzollern masters despised Jewry and Jews except when they could borrow money from them or use them as

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spies, seemed a comical reversion to an outworn primitive concept. Some of its supporters disguised it a little by clothing it in modern scientific phrase. We have heard their assertions about the "survival of the fittest." Others tell us that there have been only two "male" races — the Roman and the German. The Romans subdued all the "female" races of their epoch; the German mission is to bring all the "female" races of our time under their subjection. A delightful example of unconscious humor! Solomon, the sovereign of the Chosen People in B.C. 990, possessed a thousand flesh-and-blood females; William II, sovereign of the German chosen people in A.D. 1914, aspired to possess as many

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"female" races. So would the intimations of Holy Scripture be fulfilled by the establishment of a political world-harem at Berlin.

The cult of the Superman could flourish only in a time and among a people given over to materialism. The astonishing feats of the Germans were the product, as we saw, not of unusual genius — far less of any superhuman faculty — but of a nation whose men, women, and children, old and young, had been reduced to so complete a state of mechanical obedience that they could be directed by a single will just as every cog, wheel, belt, and spindle of a factory is controlled by the engineer who turns the power on or off. You may marvel, if you will, at the success that those have

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had whose interest it was to bring seventy million human beings to the state of machines; but when you look abroad over nature or over history you will come upon so many examples of docility and imitation that you will perceive that these qualities belong to a lower rather than to a higher order of intelligence. Watch a flock of sheep scampering after their bellwether, or a procession of caterpillars crawling in an unbroken line, one behind the other, wherever the leader takes them. How obedient they are! How German! Remember such vast collective enterprises as the Crusades, in which not merely one people but all the countries of Christendom — even tens of thousands of little children, so truly

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childish is the German frame of mind — were impelled by the same motive; remember with what efficiency the Inquisition did its work in Europe and America, and at its height yielded nothing in thoroughness and in black results to the highest Prussian standard. The thing itself is old; only this recent manifestation and the names are new.

On the teachability of the human biped his progress, of course, depends. Civilization inheres in the doctrines he is taught and in the spirit in which he uses them, — the spirit: for the wisest and best men have discerned in man something invisible, intangible, immaterial, but most real, to which they give this name. There are two sorts

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of education: The one endeavors to liberate the spirit; the other to train those faculties which spring from the physical nature of man. The finished product of the former education is an individual who thinks for himself and wills for himself — and recognizes his moral responsibility; that of the latter is a machine who receives his thoughts from outside and whose will and acts are controlled by a master.

Submissiveness, obedience, docility, and all other forms of protective coloration from fear date from primitive times, when they were the effects produced by superior brute force on the weak. Later, cunning in various guises managed to share the mastery with force. In

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one way or another the weak were controlled through their fears; and, however we disguise it, the same is true to-day.

But certain aspirations are almost as instinctive as fears, and it is by playing on these aspirations that the greatest workers of iniquity — ambitious war lords and religious fanatics — have dissembled their purposes from the multitudes whom they employed to do them. Patriotism and religion are the commonest, the most effective of these deceptions. Either of them has the power, like a terrible drug, to deprive its victim of his normal human character. How else explain the pious edification with which crowds of the "faithful" witnessed the tortures and slaying

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of heretics; or the frenzied exultation of the spectators of the orgies of the French Revolution — worshipers not of Saint Dominic but of Saint Guillotine — for whose patriotic edification the heads could not drop fast enough into the blood-soaked sawdust? An unlimited capacity for hero-worship — which, like love, is blind — shows itself early in the development of the human race, and has been almost as great a source of evil as of good. If you turn your hero-worship inward to yourself the efforts of all the angels cannot save you from falling, like the Germans, into the Superman delusion.

To make men individuals and not mechanical atoms of a mass; to call out the spirit in them instead

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of reducing them to machines — that is the ideal which will forever overcome the German ideal of the Chosen People composed of Supermen, who, when scrutinized, turn out to be parts of a gigantic mechanism. I repeat, man is compounded of matter and of spirit, and since his creation there has been a perpetual conflict between the two. For ages together matter seems to dominate; and then spirit breaks through, frees itself and regenerates the world. Under the guise of the Superman matter has waged its latest war for empire, and it has been beaten.

Should we not be grateful to the Germans who have organized matter into the most remarkable machine man has ever contrived — a

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machine in which the human and the material parts are indistinguishable; a machine which the oil of Kaiser-worship lubricates and for which the fuel of patriotism supplies the power; a machine which represents the ultimate attainment of science? Having examined the prodigy can we not refresh ourselves with the thought that this is the best and the worst that matter, whose spokesman is German science, can do? It cost Europe more lives than the present Atrocious War will take, to get rid of the diabolical belief in witches. Shall we not say that that riddance was worth the price? Will not posterity declare that the exploding of the Superman delusion and of the giving over of the civilized world to

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German domination, which that delusion threatened, was also worth its price?

More than thirty-five centuries ago the race which then inhabited the Plain of Shinar, the Prussians of those times and perhaps their forerunners, looking up at the sun and stars, and, more conversant with material than spiritual laws, thought that they could build them a tower by which they could mount to those celestial regions and possess them. But the Lord, looking down upon their city and their tower, said: "Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do. Go to, let us

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go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech. So the Lord scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city." The name of that tower was Babel, and never since that time has the Lord given his approval to Supermen who would conquer the earth in the Prussian spirit. The one language which will unite all the races is not the language of Frightfulness — the utterance of physical force and of science — but the language of Love, through which the souls of men speak.

To us to-day who have never had any doubts as to the relative position of matter and spirit, and who have never shared the folly of

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thinking that we or any other people are Supermen, the price of the Atrocious War is staggering. But the great gods are infinite, and we can infer the importance they attach to this struggle by the magnitude of the human sacrifice they have allowed.

October, 1917.

THE END

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